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ABSTRACT

A study examined progression opportunities for adult learners in Scotland. The study focused on progression opportunities that encourage the following: (1) participation in the education system by traditionally underrepresented groups, (2) sideways movement within the education system, and (3) upward movement within the system. The two-phase study included an analysis of available literature on opportunities for progression, visits to projects, and semistructured interviews with policymakers and practitioners involved in the provision of adult education programs at the secondary and postsecondary levels. Twenty-seven respondents were interviewed regarding progression opportunities in one region, and 25 individuals were interviewed to obtain a more general overview of progression opportunities. Data from the literature review and interviews were synthesized into the following categories: aspects of progression (availability of learning opportunities, purposes of adults participation, and nature of progression); the national picture (array of available opportunities and key features encouraging each type of progression); progression policy in one region; provision of information about progression opportunities; the effectiveness of existing progression policy; and policy implications. (The project advisory committee members are listed in an appendix. Contains 22 references.) (MN)

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The Scottish Council for Research in Education

ED 362 754

Negotiating the Labyrinth:

Progression Opportunities for Adult Learners

Pamela Munn
Lyn Tett
Nick Arney

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Progression Opportunities for Adult Learners

Pamela Munn
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The Scottish Council for Research in Education

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We are especially grateful to those who spared time to be interviewed about progression policy and practice and who supplied documentary information about initiatives. Those working in the education service have many competing demands on their time at present and we particularly valued their ready co-operation in the research.

The research began as a collaborative venture between the Scottish Community Education Council (SCEC) and the Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE). Chris Pilley, of SCEC collected much of the data about the national picture of progression opportunities, reported in Chapter 2. Staff changes in SCEC resulted in SCRE taking responsibility for the project with Lyn Tett, formerly of SCEC and now at Moray House Institute of Education, providing consultancy and helping to draft the report. Janette Finlay typed successive drafts in her usual efficient manner. Responsibility for the views reported lies with the authors. They are not necessarily the views of SCRE, Moray House Institute or SOED.

Summary of main findings

This summary follows the structure of the report beginning with a general view of the opportunities available for adults before focusing on specific findings from research in one region and concluding with policy issues affecting progression. Research details are contained in Chapter 1. It is important to note that this report concentrates on the views of the providers rather than the consumers, of education and training.

Aspects of progression

Theme	*Findings*	*Locatinon in Report (Chapters)*
Availability of learning opportunities	There is a wide diversity of opportunities available in a wide range of educational institutions and organisations.	1, 2
Purposes of adults' participation	There are three broad groups. Those who are participating for reasons associated with employment; those who participate for leisure and recreational reasons; those who participate for broad personal and social reasons. Adults can participate in the same courses for different purposes.	1
Nature of progression	There are three broad kinds of progression opportunities. Progression from non-participation to participation; from one subject to another or one institution to another at the same level; from one level upwards to the next.	1

The national picture

Array of opportunities available	The range of opportunities available from a wide range of providers is very diverse. Key features of this diversity are the mode of provision and the level and methods of accreditation.	2
Key features encouraging progression from non-participation to participation	Two major initiatives were examined; Adult Learners' Week (1992) and Strathclyde's Local Collaborative Programme. In these initiatives barriers to participation were overcome by collaboration amongst providers; a clear map of progression routes into a wide variety of	2

	provision; support for participants through fee waivers, crêche provision and locally-based courses; advice and guidance.	
Key features encouraing progression at the same level	Curriculum initiatives, particularly the opportunities presented by a modular approach, are an important component in building adults' confidence through offering sideways moves. Such modular approaches in both further and higher education encourage progression by: providing guidance; enabling adults to access a diversity of opportunities in terms of both subject areas and methods of delivery; the accreditation of prior learning; changes in the traditional subject-centred institutional culture.	2
Key features encouraging progression onwards and upwards	Two initiatives were examined; the Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP) and BAKITS, an employer-based training programme. Key findings from SWAP were the importance of collaboration among further and higher education institutions and Regional Authorities; innovative assessment methods to encourage initial participation; explicit preparation for the conditions students will experience in higher education. Key findings from BAKITS were the importance of collaboration between education and industry; flexible learning and assessment systems; courses tailored to a particular client group.	2
Key features encouraging all three types of progression	Two initiatives were examined; the Ferguslie Park Open Learning Centre and a WEA 'Learning for Earning' course. Key findings were the importance of: a structure which highlights the benefits of collaboration between providers; effective pre-entry, on-going and exit guidance to participants; flexible learning routes; clear maps of possible progression routes; consultation and negotiation with participants; evaluation of qualitative and quantitative outcomes.	2

Progression policy in one region

Providers emphasised learners' needs as the important element in policy development	Providers' policies on progression were designed to encourage and sustain participation in education as a normal activity.	3
Key features of progression opportunities	There were three common features: collaboration within and across sectors; open access opportunities; developing students' responsibility for their own progression.	3
Lack of explicit policy on progression	Progression strategies appeared to arise in an ad hoc way rather than as a result of clearly thought out policy.	3, 5, 6
Need for planned programmes of staff development	There was a paucity of planned opportunities particularly for part-time staff.	3, 4
Need to clarify students' goals and anticipated gains from participation	Tutors helped students to consider the personal and social as well as the vocational goals to be gained from participation and consequently provision was designed which went beyond the strictly vocational.	3
Motivation of students	Students who participated in provision as a condition of receiving benefits or to please others were reported as not doing well.	3
Role of education in social and economic regeneration	Successful progression strategies can sometimes have detrimental effects on local communities by leaving behind a non-participating 'underclass'. Education can therefore only be part of a multi-pronged regeneration strategy.	3

Providing information about progression opportunities

Pre-course information	Providers used a wide variety of methods but believed the most effective was direct personal contact between tutors and adults. Targetting particular groups within the community was seen as a useful method for stimulating entry into the system. There was a need for ready access to locally available information.	4
On-course information	Providers tried to build information on progression opportunities into programmes although this had implications for staff development.	4

Image of adult education	People can have an out-dated image of the institutions offering education and training. There is a need to highlight innovations and the diverse opportunities now available.	4
Different information needs of adults	Three broad categories of adult learners were identified by interviewees: those who had a clear understanding of their goals; those who were highly motivated, but unclear about their goals; those who were 'reluctant' learners. Each category needed different kinds of information and support.	4
Role of tutors	Tutors were regarded as key sources of information and had an important front-line guidance role although this role could only be developed successfully if they had access to appropriate staff development.	4

How well is progression policy working?

Paucity of monitoring and evaluation strategies	Evaluation was mainly concerned with whether the needs of learners had been properly identified and whether the target populations were making use of progression opportunities. However, very limited efforts were made to monitor and evaluate provision because managers were unsure of what counted as significant evidence of achievement and they had limited resources of funding and staff time at their disposal.	5
Utilisation of monitoring and evaluation information	At practitioner level there was an example of innovation in evaluation by the Adult Basic Education Service. There were also other examples where information was collected but neither analysed nor used for subsequent planning. To be useful, monitoring and evaluation information had to be easy to analyse and implement.	5
Impact of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992	All respondents saw this Act as affecting progression although there were differences between the various sectors about the nature and extent of its impact. Many practitioners were concerned about the replacement of collaboration by competition. They highlighted the need for an impartial guidance system, to advise adult learners.	5

Policy implications

The following policy implications are drawn from the research findings. They are the opinions of the authors. The chapters in brackets indicate the evidence which suggested the policy implications.

Importance of collaboration	Collaboration takes time and effort but clearly benefits students, institutions and staff. SWAP is a particularly effective example.	6 (2, 3)
Market forces and collaboration	Competition among institutions may replace collaboration if funding follows students. Performance indicators which highlight student completion rates, examination performance and employment may discourage institutions from accepting 'risky' students who are likely to depress their performance profile.	6 (5)
Policies which would encourage collaboration	The importance of collaboration should be publicly acknowledged by central government. Incentives and staff should be provided to encourage collaboration across and between sectors. Non-standard entrants to universities should attract a special weighting.	6 (2, 3)
Importance of independent advice and guidance for adults	The diversity of opportunities can bewilder and confuse adult students so it is important that nationally and regionally co-ordinated services offering impartial guidance are available. Such services should be available on an outreach basis and target particular groups.	6 (2, 3, 4)
What counts as quality in adult education for evaluation purpses?	Collecting reliable and valid information in relation to progression is difficult and few providers had well thought out and feasible evaluation schemes. Initiatives which would address this issue such as research on quality and a pilot progression monitoring scheme should be encouraged by central government.	6 (2, 5)
Changes in the nature of teaching	Changes in institutional cultures, the role of subject tutors in guidance, the importance of staff-student relationships all require staff development programmes.	6 (2, 3, 4)

Reasons for encouraging participation and progressioncollaboration	Education by itself cannot lead to economic growth. Personal and social gains for individuals and communities are also important and should be stressed.	6 (3)
Importance of sustained national, regional and institutional policy initiatives	In the absence of clear policies progression opportunities can become a low priority.	6 (5)

1 Aspects of progression

'There is an abundance of learning opportunities for adults.'

This statement from a recent HMI report (1992) is one of the great strengths of adult education. The provision of education and training opportunities for adults takes many different forms. Opportunities are available in a wide range of educational institutions and organisations such as the community education service, further education colleges, secondary schools, voluntary organisations, universities and other higher education institutions. In addition there are those such as commercial organisations, employers, and Local Enterprise Companies, where provision of education and training is only a part of their remit. Provision covers all levels from adult basic education to degree level study and beyond and includes a wide variety of modes of attendance. Some adults attend full-time and some part-time and courses may involve daytime or evening study. In general adults are characterised by their tendency to move in and out of provision and some providers of education for adults have taken account of this. More flexible forms of provision including forms of distance learning where the learner rarely, if at all, attends a formal institution, have increased.

This diversity of opportunities, however, is also a weakness. McGivney (1990) summed up the disadvantages:

> The public as a whole has little knowledge of the nature and the extent of educational opportunities for adults. Post-compulsory education is complex, fragmented and diverse. Professionals working in one part of the system often have little knowledge or understanding of the other parts. It is unrealistic to expect the public to understand the system if educationalists themselves have little sense of the whole.

McGivney highlights the need for good guidance systems both to encourage participation by those whose experience of education is confined to their schooldays; and to sustain participation by adults who do return. Progression is therefore, an important issue for the individual wishing to take part in education and training, for policy makers in local and central government and for employers and trade unions. Reasons for developing progression opportunities include the need for a better qualified, more flexible and adaptable workforce, the provision of individual and community development opportunities and the implementation of equality of opportunity policies.

Before turning to the meaning of progression, it is necessary to say a little about patterns of adult participation in education and training. It was these which helped inform the focus of the research.

Patterns in participation

There has been a marked increase in the number of adults participating in education. Latest figures from the Scottish Office Education Department (SOED) show that in almost all sectors where statistics are available, more adults are participating than ever before. For example, according to Scottish Office statistics (1993):

- there were over 14,000 adults in Scottish schools in 1991 compared to about 13,600 in 1989
- age participation rates of students aged 20 and over in full-time vocational further education have risen from 3.2 per 1,000 population in 1988/89 to 4.4 in 1990/91. There were 15,498 full-time students aged 20 and over in vocational further education in 1991/92
- there were over 9,000 undergraduate entrants to full-time courses in higher education aged 21 and over in 1990/91 compared to 7,378 in 1988/89. These represent age participation rates per 1,000 of the Scottish population aged 21 and over of 2.5 and 2.0 respectively.

The statistic that has tended to remain static is that of mature students entering part-time degree courses in higher education. Here, numbers have remained at about 15,000 or so since 1986/87. However, provisional figures for 1991/92 indicate a rise in undergraduate entrants to part-time courses aged 21 or over to 17,000 (SOED 1993).

Figures are not easily available for informal, community-based education. However, to take the Strathclyde Collaborative Programme as an example, about 15,000 adults are reported to have participated in 1992 (personal communication, March 1993). The Programme involves collaboration among further education colleges, the community education service and the voluntary sector to provide a range of courses based on local needs identified through community groups and local organisations (Chapter 2 contains a fuller description).

These figures, based largely on government statistics, are impressive. They show a response by institutional providers to new client groups but much remains to be done. Another set of statistics, based on surveys of adults rather than on institutional returns, suggests that there is no room for complacency.

- Participation in adult education in general in Scotland is significantly less extensive than the UK as a whole (Sargant 1991).
- Participation is associated with socio-economic status. Munn and MacDonald (1988) reported that in their sample of adults 74% of those in professional and managerial occupations had participated. 77% of those in semi-and unskilled occupations had not.
- There is extensive ignorance of provision. According to Munn and MacDonald (1988) 25% of adults were unable to name one provider of adult education; 21% were unaware of any adult educational opportunities whatsoever.

A general problem with statistics on adult participation is the definition of adult. Different ages are used. Our approach was to concentrate on progression opportunities for people who were *returning* to education after a break of two years or more from their initial full-time education.

Turning now to adult participants themselves, how can they be characterised? They tend to be under 35, from skilled, managerial or professional backgrounds and to have either positive memories of, or tangible achievements from, school. It is more difficult to classify their purposes in participating. At the risk of oversimplification they can be divided into three broad groups. Firstly, there are those who are participating for reasons associated with employment; for example they may be seeking qualifications to gain promotion, or to change career direction or to re-enter the labour market after a prolonged absence. Secondly, a large number of adults participate for leisure and recreational reasons. They seek relaxation and see participation as a means to that end. A third group participates for broad personal and social reasons, such as 'getting out of the home', 'meeting new people' and so on.

Previous research has demonstrated how difficult it is to categorise courses unequivocally as either vocational or non-vocational (Lowden et al, 1990; Marks and Elsdon, 1991). Adults can participate in the same courses for very different reasons. Furthermore, reasons for participation can change during a course. Case-studies of 50 adult participants by Blair *et al* (1993) showed almost a half switching from employment to education goals as they experienced initial success. Adults' confidence grew with participation and this led some of them to believe they 'could do more'. For others continued participation was a means of postponing possible rejection in the search for a job.

Non-participants tend to be from older age groups, ethnic minorities, the long-term unemployed and those from semi- and unskilled occupations. In addition, those living in rural areas and women with dependent children tend to be under-represented. Some adults in these categories can be characterised as lacking the confidence to access educational opportunities and may require additional support and encouragement.

What is progression?

A review of patterns of participation suggested that the study of progression should focus on three broad kinds of opportunities:

a. Those which targeted traditionally under-represented groups and encouraged initial return. In this sense progression was from non-participation to participation

b. Those which facilitated sideways moves within the system. Here progression might be from one subject to another; or one institution to another at the same course level

c. Those which explicitly encouraged movement onwards and upwards within the system. Examples here would be clearly articulated routes from further to higher education; or from uncertificated to certificated courses.

As we shall see below, different providers tend to concentrate on different categories of progression opportunities. The Community Education Service, (CES), is mainly concerned with type (a); university continuing education departments and the voluntary sector with type (b); and further and higher education institutions with type (c). However, this is an oversimplification of a complex picture of provision. In particular, it underplays the pivotal role of further education colleges in progression opportunities. They receive learners from community based provision,

provide sideways and upwards moves within their own institutions and pass learners on to higher education. Indeed, further education colleges are the best known providers of adult education in Scotland, perhaps because of their multifaceted provision (Munn and MacDonald, 1988).

The picture of provision is complex and it is in a state of change. The uncertainties about the future of the community education service, the restructuring of local government into single tier authorities, the independence of further education colleges from local authorities and the new structures under which higher education institutions will operate make it difficult to paint a valid picture of progression opportunities. These changes were ones which worried providers. Collaboration among providers was seen as important for encouraging progression in all three senses of the term outlined above. Yet government policy was emphasising competition and highlighting the beneficial effects of market forces upon provision. These concerns are reflected from time to time throughout this report. They are discussed most fully in the concluding chapter. For the moment, let us say a word about the research.

The research

The research is part of a wider study of adults in education focusing on provision, progression and guidance. The wider study has also investigated adults in schools. The study reported here concentrates on progression opportunities and concentrates on the view of policy makers and providers. It involved two main phases:

- an investigation of national and local strategies being employed to encourage progression
- a more detailed study of the provision of progression opportunities in one region.

The first phase of the work involved an analysis of the available literature on opportunities for progression; visits to projects and interviews with key individuals. This phase was invaluable in providing a general picture of progression opportunities and in identifying key issues to be explored in phase two.

Phase two concentrated on one region and specifically on providers of education and training. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with those responsible for management and policy and with a small sample of those responsible for putting policy into practice. Faced with a wide range of opportunities for progression, it was decided to direct the research towards a number of key services and providers. As will be seen from Table 1.1 respondents were drawn from the region's education service; two universities, two colleges of further education, two community schools, the local enterprise company, the Workers' Educational Association as one of the largest providers in the voluntary sector and two progression projects, the Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP) and the community-based adult education initiative in an area of social and economic deprivation.

Table 1.1: The sample

Provider	Management	Practitioners
The local authority	Depute Director: Tertiary Education Assistant Director: FE Assistant Director: Careers Service Senior Development Officer: Adult and Continuing Education	ABE Team Leader
FE Colleges	Head of General Education Department Assistant Principal	Head of Guidance Team
Universities	Head of Continuing Education Department Student Access Officer	Education Liaison Officer Faculty Adviser of Studies Access Co-ordinator A Continuing Education Programme Organiser
Community High Schools	Head of Community Education Adult and Continuing Education Co-ordinator	Community worker Link worker
LEC	LEC Training Executive	Development work
WEA	Scottish Secretary	Tutor Organiser
SWAP	Director of Area Consortium	Access Co-ordinator (FE)
Adult Education Initiative	Local initiative project co-ordinator	Link Tutor

The interviews were designed to explore five main areas:

- the existence of policies and strategies for progression
- the demand for progression opportunities
- the provision of information to staff, adult students and the general public about progression opportunities
- the monitoring and evaluation of progression strategies
- the key influences on progression routes.

A total of 27 respondents took part in the regional study and 25 in the more general overview of progression opportunities. Our findings are illustrative rather than generalisable. We aim, however, to identify and offer a commentary on key issues which we hope will assist in the future development of progression strategies.

The structure of the report

The report has six chapters of which this is the first. Chapter 2 sets out some examples of national and local progression opportunities and identifies the key issues arising from these. Chapters 3-5 explore these issues in the context of one region. Chapter 3 concentrates on progression policies and highlights their key features such as collaboration, open access and encouraging students to take responsibility for their own progression. Chapter 4 pin-points the need for good information and advice systems and Chapter 5 considers evaluation and monitoring. Chapter 6 discusses policy issues affecting progression opportunities and speculates on the consequences of increased competition among providers for progression.

2 The national picture

There has been a marked increase in the numbers of adults participating in education over the last decade. Chapter 1 highlighted the increased numbers in further and higher education and pointed to the numbers of adults now in schools. Similarly the community education service, local enterprise companies and the voluntary sector report rising levels of participation. In part, this increase is due to an increase in provision. As supply expands, the demand for participation is there to take advantage of it. Opportunities are now available in a wide range of institutions and organisations, both statutory and non-statutory. A glance at provision in different sectors reveals the following array of opportunities, which provide examples of some of the range now available.

Higher education

An increase in part-time degree provision; increasing numbers of full-time mature students at degree level with non-standard entry requirements; involvement in the Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (SCOTCATS); collaboration with further education on access courses.

Continuing Education Departments in HE

A range of provision especially for adults including professional updating; access courses; courses for women returners; courses for disadvantaged groups.

Further education

A wide range of full-time, part-time and distance learning provision; vocational and non-vocational courses; certificated and uncertificated courses; collaborative work with community education and higher education. Colleges also provide an important contribution to prison education; they cater for adults with special educational needs; they provide short courses for industry.

Schools

Adults in daytime and evening classes; certificated and uncertificated courses; particularly attractive to women returners; often have high quality pre-5 provision.

Community education service

Adult basic education; community development; confidence building courses; liberal studies, national certificate modules; Open University short courses; informal education; outreach especially important.

Voluntary sector

Flexible response to local needs; includes courses for adults with special educational needs; provision for women returners; pre-retirement courses; community development work.

Local enterprise companies

A key aim is to improve the skills of people in their local areas with a view to stimulating economic growth and environmental improvement. They emphasise the availability and effective delivery of training programmes. Collaboration with other providers.

This list is by no means exhaustive. It illustrates something of the range of opportunities now available. The picture is even more diverse when the training opportunities offered by employers and the Scottish Trades Union Congress are taken into account. Furthermore, the media now play on increasingly important role, both in their own right and through supporting the Open University and Open College provision.

An indication of the diversity is given in Table 2.1 and Table 2.2 in terms of mode of provision and level and type of accreditation. We have identified these aspects as important in describing opportunities as they represent the main variables influencing the kind of progression opportunities available to adults.

In terms of mode, the wide variety of opportunities available enables adults to learn in the way which suits their individual circumstances. From Table 2.1 it can be seen that further education offers the widest range of modes of provision whilst other providers offer a more limited range but often with a special focus such as community-based learning or provision for long-term unemployed adults.

Table 2.1: Providers and Mode of Provision

Provider	F/T	P/T	Flexible	Distance	Outreach	Special Focus of Provision? eg community-based special educational needs: unemployed
Higher Education	√	√	•	•	–	–
Further Education	√	√	√	•	√	–
Community Education	–	√	√	–	√	√
Voluntary Organisations	–	√	•	–	√	•
Secondary Schools	•	√	•	–	–	–
Community Based Initiatives	•	√	√	–	√	√
Open University	–	–	√	√	–	–
Open College	–	–	√	√	–	–
Broadcasters	–	–	√	–	–	–
STUC	–	√	•	•	–	√
LEC Accredited Providers	–	•	•	–	–	√
Employers	–	•	•	•	–	√

Key: √ = main mode of provision • = some provision – = little or no provision

The wide diversity of levels and methods of accreditation is mapped out in Table 2.2, again reflecting the wide range of adults' requirements. It is interesting to note, however, that a method of accreditation which is particularly appropriate for adults, namely Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) is not yet widely available.

Table 2.2: Providers and Accreditation

Provider	Non-formal	Non-Cert	Non-Adv eg Nat Cert	Advanced eg HND	Degree and above	Competence Based	APL	Exams
Higher Education	•	•	–	–	√	–	•	√
Further Education	–	–	√	√	–	√	•	•
Community Education	√	√	•	–	–	•	–	–
Voluntary Organisations	√	√	–	–	–	–	–	–
Secondary Schools	•	•	√	–	–	•	–	•
Community Based Initiatives	√	√	•	–	–	•	–	–
Open University	•	–	–	√	√	–	•	√
Open College	√	√	•	–	–	•	–	–
Broadcasters	√	√	–	–	–	–	–	–
STUC	√	√	–	–	–	–	–	–
LEC Accredited Providers	•	•	√	•	–	√	–	–
Employers	√	√	•	•	–	•	–	•

Key: √ = main focus • = some focus – = little or no focus

The bewildering array of opportunities for initial participation and for sustaining participation made it impossible, within the resources available to the project, to provide a comprehensive map of opportunities. Rather we have focused on a small number of national and local initiatives, designed to illustrate one of the following:

- entry into the system
- sideways moves
- onwards and upwards moves.

We provide a brief description of these initiatives and attempt to identify their key features in terms of facilitating progression. We end the chapter with a discussion of these key features.

Entry to the system for the unqualified individual

Research into the extent and pattern of adult participation in education and training shows that the majority of adults in Scotland do not take part in education and training after leaving school (eg Munn and MacDonald, 1988). Non-participation in education in adult life is closely linked with initial educational experience. People who do not participate in any form of continuing education or training tend to be those with the least initial education. In turn this is linked to socio-economic status. Irrespective of location or educational setting, certain sections of the community tend not to engage in any form of educational activity after leaving school. Typically these are older adults; less well educated people in lower social, economic and occupational strata; women with dependent children; ethnic minority groups; and people living in rural areas. Taken together, these groups add up to a large majority, whose main characteristic is social and economic deprivation. Dispositional factors such as attitudes, perceptions and expectations

appear to constitute the most powerful deterrents to participation and these require significant intervention and changes by providers if these are to be overcome (McGivney, 1990).

Adult Learners' Week

A national initiative designed to overcome some of these barriers was "The Adult Learners' Week Initiative" which took place during the week 9 to 15 March 1992. It involved high profile collaboration between education and training providers, the broadcasting companies and adult returners. Through a range of special broadcasts, events and activities, efforts were made to tackle some of the issues underpinning non-participation in education and training, to emphasise the benefits of returning to learning and to show that adults' barriers to learning could be overcome.

The BBC, Channel 4 and the ITV companies gave a national impetus to the initiative with a range of special broadcasts and print materials on adult learning, including feature films, a signposting booklet on ways of accessing information and a directory of independent learning opportunities, documentaries featuring adult learners and comedy sketches involving celebrities returning to study. Successful adult learners were profiled by the ITV companies through the television "Outstanding Adult Learners' Awards" to present a positive image of returning to learning. A free telephone helpline was set up by the BBC and the Department of Employment and publicised on national television. All callers to the line were sent a booklet which described the variety of provision and gave contact points. Individuals with specific guidance needs were 'phoned back by a counsellor who gave them detailed advice. Leaflets, information packs and videos describing local provision were produced and distributed throughout the Scottish regions and newspaper articles and supplements advertising local provision as well as local radio broadcasts were used. Education and training providers opened their doors to adults by staging special taster courses, open days or evenings. Exhibitions and displays describing local opportunities were set up in Job Centres, libraries, workplaces and shopping centres throughout the country. It is estimated that in excess of 25,000 adults in Scotland attended events and drop-in advice centres or called local or national telephone helplines for advice and guidance on education and training opportunities during and after the Week. All providers reported that the adults responding to the initiative represented a significant increase in enquiries compared with previous years. For example, the adult basic education service in Inverness reported that the number of referrals received during the four week period from 9 March 1992 was only 3 persons short of the entire number of referrals recorded for the same period during the preceding four years. Adult Learners' Week was repeated in 1993 and is likely to be an annual event.

Key features of this initiative were:

- collaboration among providers
- information to potential participants about the wide diversity of provision which would meet a variety of individual needs
- a clear map of progression routes into a wide variety of opportunities
- advice and guidance both through the national telephone helpline and through individual providers' own guidance systems.

Strathclyde's local collaborative programme

Another initiative at regional level which also involves collaboration is the Local Collaborative Programme (LCP) which is provided throughout Strathclyde Region by colleges of further education, the community education service and voluntary organisations. Some initiatives designed to encourage entry to the system for the first time expect adults to come to the providers but this one makes provision available in the communities themselves.

Throughout the region, between 500 and 600 courses are run each year. The programme allows the community education service, often in collaboration with voluntary organisations, to identify local needs and for the appropriate programmes to be devised and delivered by further education colleges on an outreach basis. The main objectives underlying these practical arrangements are to establish progression routes between informal and formal education, to stimulate social and economic regeneration through education and training and to build bridges between separate elements of the education service for the benefits of local communities. Part of the wider overall purpose is to introduce formal educational provision into a community context.

One of the key characteristics of the LCP is the way in which classes are incorporated into the activities of communities and interest groups, either through previously identified groups into whose existing programme a more formal class was introduced, or by bringing together people who share an interest or need, such as being unemployed, or through promoting a course in a particular geographical area. Roughly 15,000 people participate each year in programmes. Examples of courses include a 'pathfinder' course for a group of disabled people to enable them to consider what their future options and choices could be; a 'stepping stones' course for a group of single parents on low incomes covering budgeting and personal presentation to help them make the most of their limited resources; supported study facilities enable people living in a remote rural area to study open learning packages in a wide variety of subjects ranging from English to computing; and outdoor activities for a group of unemployed young men which also includes basic communication skills.

A key component of these programmes is the consultation and negotiation with the participants on learning needs, curricula, methods of delivery, modes of attendance and styles of learning to ensure that the programmes are student centred. The numerous practical obstacles that prevent individuals from taking up education opportunities, for example lack of time, money, transport, daytime facilities and childcare, are all taken into account in making provision. Guidance is also a key component often taking the form of the SCOTVEC 'Options and Choices' module. Such provision, however, is expensive both in terms of physical and human resources and one important range of outcomes, which include increased confidence, self-sufficiency and autonomy, is not easily measurable.

Key features of this programme are:

- collaboration among providers
- consultation and negotiation with participants
- support for participants through fee waivers, creche provision and locally-based courses which minimised travel costs
- guidance.

Both initiatives raise the issue of effective evaluation. Both have information on numbers participating and have been the subjects of studies or inspections which detail a number of quantitative measures for assessing their effectiveness (Bryan and Tett, 1992; HMI, 1991). All LCP courses have specified learning outcomes but these rarely include the assessment of increases in self-confidence on the part of the participants although this is frequently mentioned as an important measure of success. We will discuss this issue further in our conclusions.

Sideways moves within the system

For many adults 'progression' involves pursuing the same sorts of courses in the same sorts of settings; pursuing different sorts of courses while staying in the same setting; pursuing different (rather than more advanced) modules or degrees in further and higher education. For many adults such sideways progression is an important component in building confidence in their ability to progress. National initiatives designed to encourage this kind of progression could be broadly considered under curriculum initiatives, particularly the opportunities presented by a modular approach.

Modular provision

The key characteristics of modules are the flexibility and choice they offer both learners and providers. They divide knowledge into units and these units can be studied part-time or full-time and in many different combinations. There are modules in general education topics such as communication as well as in job related training. It is possible for employers to negotiate with FE colleges particular combinations of modules for employee training and these can be assessed in the workplace.

Modules have particular advantages for those able to study only on a part-time basis and for those who want to 'dip their toes in the water' of returning to education and training. They are, therefore, potentially attractive to women and for work related training. Recent figures from SOED show that women aged 25 or over now outnumber men of the same age group in non-advanced further education, while the general rise in participation in non-advanced further education is largely attributable to the increase in registration of mature students, male and female (SOED, 1992). In Scotland, a modular approach is typically associated with SCOTVEC, the national accrediting body for national certificate modules. However, modules, or the principles of a modular approach are gradually being adopted in other parts of the education and training system. In higher education, advanced courses such as Higher National Certificates and Higher National Diplomas are being 'unitised'. In higher education, some undergraduate and postgraduate degrees are similarly being modularised.

The Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme

Another example of a national initiative designed to encourage sideways moves is the Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (SCOTCATS). This is a system by which one institution can give credit for qualifications gained in another

institution or through another certificating agency. In general, the qualification held and the course/subject or unit of study against which credit is required must 'match up' and the knowledge and skills offered for accreditation must be relevant and up to date. Almost all universities are members of the SCOTCATS scheme and, through SCOTVEC and HNC/HND courses, all further education colleges. There are agreements between Scottish and English/Welsh systems. International agreements including SVQs and NVQs are also being negotiated.

Several thousand students are currently involved in the scheme at different institutions, including nearly 700 at Paisley University. The Paisley University CATS scheme was launched in September 1990 and has grown from 32 students participating in the first year to its present number who are taking subject units from a full range of full-time, part-time and evening programmes. This increase can be accounted for in two main ways. First of all the marketing of CATS by the University has increased awareness of its benefits. These include non-traditional entry, the incorporation of appropriate prior learning into a personalised study programme, part-time, full-time and evening attendance, study pace determined by the student and not by the institution, lower costs and often shorter courses, a facility for paying fees by instalment with discounts for the unemployed and block timetabling for cost-effective attendance at college. The second feature has been the additional resources made available to the CATS unit from BP which has allowed for a more efficient and effective service to be provided, including a comprehensive interview and admissions process and a more responsive and efficient administrative structure for the management of the scheme.

The operation of the CATS scheme has called for changes in the institutional culture. Staff report, for example, that courses require to be re-timetabled, student records redesigned, and courses become more consumer oriented. Therefore the traditional course design teams become less important in these circumstances. Pressures are put on accommodation. Teaching support, particularly for evening students is critical.

This initiative clearly shows how sideways moves within the system can sustain adults' participation in education and training. The major impact in further and higher education institutes, however, is that the traditional department and subject base is transcended by students moving across the institution outside of these boundaries. Changes in the traditional subject-centred culture will therefore need to be made if students and institutions are to gain the full benefits of such initiatives.

On the other hand, organisations such as the WEA or the Community Education Service, whose main purpose is to provide non-formal education, do not have a subject-centred culture and are particularly open to sideways moves within the system. Indeed, in the past, their orientation has often been to sustaining participation within their systems rather than moving students onwards and upwards. Providers and participants alike may have suffered from a fear of letting go of the supportive situation which they were providing, or participating in. Progression in this case has been likened to the 'stepping out of the warm bath syndrome' — it is comfortable in the warm water, you know you have stayed long enough, but it might be cold and uncomfortable when you first step out (ALBSU, 1992).

Key features of this initiative are:

- guidance
- a diversity of opportunities in terms of both subject areas and methods of delivery
- accredition of prior learning
- changes in institutional culture.

The issue highlighted here about the necessity for staff training and development opportunities to encourage such cultural change will be taken up again in Chapter 6.

Moving onwards and upwards

Many of the initiatives deliberately designed to encourage progression are concerned with this particular type of progression, which is perhaps the most obvious meaning of the term, students moving to successively more demanding courses.

The Scottish Wider Access Programme

A good example of onwards and upwards opportunities is the Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP) which was set up in April 1988 by the Secretary of State for Scotland, with funding from what were then called the SED and the Training Agency. Its aim is to enable greater numbers of adults to enter vocationally relevant higher education. It is delivered through three consortia: North of Scotland, South East Scotland and West of Scotland. Each consortium has, as its lead agency, a regional council and has, as members, all publicly funded educational institutions and regional councils in the area covered. In 1991-92 it involved some 1,600 students and all the further education colleges and higher education institutions in Scotland and was funded to the tune of £500,000 by SOED. A similar amount was provided, mainly in kind, through the three consortia.

SWAP promotes collaboration between further and higher education institutions by encouraging joint curriculum planning. Most courses are taught by further education college staff. Visiting lecturers from nearby higher education institutions can help build students' confidence about their ability to cope with demands of university life. Progression rates from SWAP are around 70% of students completing their Access courses and figures show that the initiative has been reasonably successful in attracting traditionally under-represented groups (Munn *et al*, 1993; Gallacher *et al* 1992). It is worth mentioning that local authority bursaries of £2,000/£3,000 (depending on circumstances) are available to full-time students.

The establishment of SWAP was a recognition that the increasing demand by employers for highly skilled personnel and the predicted drop in the number of school leavers would lead to a significant shortfall in the number of graduates and highly qualified people in the years to come. It also recognised that many adults are capable of obtaining qualifications in higher education if given access to, and preparation for, appropriate courses at our universities and colleges.

An example of an Access course is that offered by Moray College of Further Education in collaboration with Aberdeen University under the auspices of the

North of Scotland Consortium (NORSWAP). The College now offers, through its division of Social Studies, a number of Access courses aimed at adults without formal educational qualifications and offering guaranteed access to higher education, upon successful completion, through an 'Access to degree study certificate'.

The 'Access to degree studies' course lasts 35 weeks. Both Moray College and Aberdeen University stress the importance of developing learning and study skills, to allow students to prepare for higher education. Emphasis is also given to providing a variety of opportunities for enhanced self-awareness, personal development, and preparation for urban living.

Selection to the Access course is by interview and assessment of prior learning, carried out informally at Moray College, and each Access subject is assessed both by continuous assessment (course work 60%) and by Aberdeen University.

Students at Moray College suffer from disadvantage in terms of the geographical distance from the receiving higher education institutions. Many students, especially mothers living in the city, can attend further education Access courses and transfer to higher education by making suitable arrangements for childcare. However, many potential students from Moray find higher education impossible, because of travelling times and subsequent family disruption. Many Access applications foundered on the rocks of geographical distance. As at 1991 there had not been a single drop-out amongst those who had gone on to higher education. The maintenance of the 100% continuation rate from the first intake of students in October 1988 to the session ending in 1991 is unexpected, given the special problems that students face in either having to move their families to Aberdeen or to cope with long journeys on a daily basis to and from the University. The Moray programme explicitly covers such issues to prepare students for what lies ahead and visits are made by the Moray students to the University each year. This visit includes an opportunity to meet and explore questions of concern with previous students who have proceeded to degree study. Not only is there a high continuation rate but students have performed well academically.

Key features of this initiative are:

- collaboration among further and higher education institutions and regional authorities
- innovative assessment methods to encourage initial participation
- explicit preparation for the conditions students will experience at the next stage of their education.

BAKITS

Another example of this type of progression, but this time with an industrial base, is the 'BAKITS' scheme offered by Matheson's the Bakers. Matheson's is a family bakery business founded in 1872. Three elements, baking, retail and catering, have been present throughout its history. At present the company has 17 bakers' shops and three restaurants all located in and around the Falkirk area. The workforce totals approximately 300 full-time and part-time staff.

Over the last ten years, the major challenge has been to retain the benefits of being a small family business, while undergoing expansion, and maintain profitable business performance despite changes in the market place. Alongside the company's

traditional approach to running the business, Matheson's now report a new emphasis on the development of human resources and the use of technology to achieve future goals.

A new approach to training has been developed. Previous training methods had had limited success in creating an awareness among the workforce of the need to improve standards. Those methods required the supervisor to be the trainer. Matheson's believed that better results could be achieved through open and flexible approaches and materials. This allowed the supervisor to support the workers' own learning. With the help of Forth Valley Enterprise, Matheson's reviewed their training programmes and, from this, developed an open learning package involving text, video and computer-based training.

What started off as a project for Matheson's has now developed into a complete review and overhaul of national standards, the co-ordination of the delivery mechanism and assessment schemes through City & Guilds and SCOTVEC, and a re-vamping of the BAKITS assessment scheme. Not only has the original aim of the production of flexible training material been fulfilled, but also the skills assessed have been accepted as the industry standard by the Craft Baking Industry's Lead Body.

As a result of this work, Matheson's report a marked change in employee attitudes towards the achievement of consistent quality. Employees now take responsibility for the overall performance of the bakery and work in teams has improved. SCOTVEC have agreed to rewrite their National Certificate using the content of the package as the basis for the syllabus. This will be at the Level 1 SVQ which will therefore be achievable either in the workplace or at college or a combination of both. The agreement with The Scottish Association of Master Bakers (SAMB) to endorse the learning packages and promote them to their membership means that the market for the package is extended to the 360 members of SAMB, covering 6,000 to 7,000 employees in Scotland. There has also been interest south of the border.

It is intended that the packages will be used at all levels within the industry offering not only a structured entry to employment as part of the induction process, but also progression for people once they are employed. The packages cover not only craft skills, but also hygiene and communication and interpersonal skills.

This project emphasises the importance of assessment initiatives as ways of encouraging progression. Assessment can be a barrier to many adults, particularly those who are returning to learning after a long break and whose experience of assessment may well have been confined to formal end-of-term examinations. BAKITS' participants are assessed in the workplace by trained supervisors and this assessment is verified by college staff. This assessment includes the day to day tasks of the employees and tasks specifically set to be carried out in the workplace.

Key features here are:

- collaboration between education and industry
- providing flexible learning and assessment systems
- tailoring courses to a particular client group.

Being able to tailor a course appropriately means being clear about the overall objectives as well as the target group, learning outcomes, the learning and teaching methods and the form of accreditation.

All three types of progression:

The Ferguslie Park Open Learning Centre

Although we have highlighted issues designed to encourage specific types of progression, much provision encompasses all three types of progression. One such example is the Ferguslie Park Open Learning Centre which uses open learning materials in provision which is made collaboratively by a range of providers from community, further and higher education, and from the Careers Service.

In 1988, Ferguslie Park was identified by the Government as one of four areas in Scotland to be the focus of a major partnership initiative to promote physical, economic and social regeneration over a ten year period. It involves a high level of resourcing in terms of finance and multi-agency commitment, and education is seen as a vital means of underpinning the comprehensive strategy for the area. Within each educational initiative is the establishment of an open learning unit based in the heart of the community.

Although Ferguslie Park is located only two miles from the centre of Paisley, its local residents have a clear sense of identity similar to that found in rural, mining and other close-knit communities. The symptoms of hardship and deprivation are everywhere in evidence; low household incomes, unemployment of over 40%, 75% of families on Housing Benefit, 84% of primary school children qualifying for free school meals, and a high incidence of poor health. The population of Ferguslie Park itself has fallen from 12,000 twenty years ago to less than 6,000 today. Many of those left tend to be under-achievers with limited job expectations, few formal qualifications of any kind and a high level of long-term unemployment.

One important and innovative initiative to meet the problems of the area is the Open Learning Centre based at the offices of the Ferguslie Park Partnership which provides a link with Reid Kerr College, the local further education college, three miles away. Open learning is a generic term and open to a number of interpretations. In Ferguslie Park it is of the drop-in variety with tutor support. The essential idea is that when students choose a course of study, they receive a specially prepared self-instruction package. The Centre has a high-tec profile and the learning packs incorporate a wide range of teaching materials, including audio and video, computers, word-processors, and desk-top publishing. Students also have access to a tutor, normally a subject specialist, who will guide their progress and assess their performance throughout the package. They also have an individual tutor who plays a crucial role in the system. These tutors are recruited on the basis of their qualities, particularly their social and interpersonal skills, rather than for an extensive knowledge of the subject itself.

The Centre plays a pivotal role between community education on the one hand, and further and higher education on the other. Community education helps people develop their confidence to undertake learning opportunities later and so women's groups or keep-fit sessions are provided as a first step to getting involved in learning at the Centre. Each applicant for an open learning package is interviewed and a personal action plan is developed in conjunction with the Careers Officer.

Demand for courses ranges from basic literacy and numeracy through to Employment Training and qualifications such as SCOTVEC Modules and Highers. The most popular courses are SCOTVEC modules in numeracy, computing, keyboard skills and communications

In 1990/91, 160 people in Ferguslie Park studied at the Centre, of whom two-thirds were women. The performance indicators used in the Centre include qualifications obtained and drop-out rates, but also relate to changes in individual's attitudes and behaviour. The Centre does offer some qualifications itself including SCOTVEC modules and Higher English and it also has developed into a halfway house between school and university. Three people have moved through the Centre to become students at Glasgow University and one is currently at Paisley University. None of them had academic qualifications beforehand.

Key features of this initiative are:

- a structure which highlights the benefits of collaboration between providers with each of the partners having a clear role in helping adults to 'progress' in all three meanings of the term
- support to the individual both at the initial stage, through the development of the 'action plan', and as they work their way through the learning packages through their individual tutor
- flexible learning routes
- evaluation of qualitative as well as quantitative outcomes.

WEA: Learning for Earning

Another example of all three types of progression is a course called 'Learning for Earning' which is provided by the West of Scotland Workers Educational Association using funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) and Strathclyde Region.

The course is aimed at unemployed people aged 25 or older, who are involved in their local community and are considering preparation for training or employment with organisations which care or campaign within the community. The course was run for the first time in the Autumn of 1991 and covered such themes as understanding the local community, local government and political processes, the welfare state and social policies, and voluntary organisations and community involvement.

It aims to help people develop a variety of skills and to increase knowledge and confidence. These skills include organising meetings, getting the message across, designing publicity, writing effectively, interviewing, handling computers, and researching the local community. A wide range of methods is adopted, with an emphasis on experiential learning. These include group discussions, special visits, individual and group projects, video, practical exercises and case-studies. Individual support and guidance is also an important feature of the course.

Members of the course were recruited through the networks at the disposal of the WEA, including WEA groups, unemployment networks, and a variety of community groups. The participants' involvement within the local community and the extent of their prior qualifications varied considerably. A considerable measure of pre-course selection and guidance was a feature of the course and included telephone counselling. The course had 20 places and was attended by an equal number of men and women and the majority were in their mid 30s to 40s.

One common feature was that many came to the course with low self-esteem and with a negative experience of education, with a track record of failure. Completing the course was in itself a major achievement. Poverty was also a major issue, and the course would not have been viable without the £15 per week grant provided through European Social Fund, and the possibility of a childcare allowance.

Student support was an important feature of the course and there was considerable scope for a negotiated curriculum. Intended as a taster, one intention of the course was to develop confidence and open the door to further education and training by enhancing existing skills. Follow-up was another integral element of the course and both group and individual meetings were organised which allowed students to consider, with a personal tutor, where they wanted to go next.

A wide range of options is on offer. Some of the older women on the course felt that it was unrealistic that they would be offered a job, but they had nevertheless been encouraged enough to apply for part-time courses. Others had decided that they wanted to stay in education, for example, to go to Jordanhill College, and others were interested in Open University short courses and in Highers.

For some men the course offered an opportunity to reflect on mid-life choices, for example, new directions in work. For others the main concern was poverty and lack of opportunities, and the course offered the chance to see the situation in a broader context. However, perhaps the greatest strength of the course was the fact that it was student-led and negotiated.

The course highlighted, on a small scale, the issues of poverty, low self-esteem and a track record of failure which are shared by many adults living in socially and economically disadvantaged areas, and showed that adequate resources are necessary if educational opportunities are to be really open to people living in poverty.

Key features of this initiative are:

- pre-entry, ongoing and exit guidance to participants
- mapping out progression routes
- consultation and negotiation with participants.

Key issues

The description of a small number of the many hundreds of initiatives designed, in their different ways, to encourage progression highlights for us a number of key issues:

- the need for **collaboration** within and across sectors to encourage participation, and to sustain the participation of those who return
- the need to sustain **diversity of provision** so that the needs of particular client groups and localities can be met. No one form of provision can meet all the needs of particular groups or individuals
- the need for changes in the **organisational culture** of institutions which takes account of students transcending traditional departmental boundaries in further and higher education and takes a positive attitude to students progressing into other sectors and institutions particularly from community -based provision

- **staff development** is essential particularly for part-time staff. These staff are involved in consultation and negotiation with learners which requires particular knowledge and skills to be developed. They also need training in student-centred learning approaches which call for high levels of skill
- the need for **effective and economical evaluation** which takes account of hard-to-measure outcomes such as increased self-confidence of adult learners. Basic information is required to convince policy makers that provision is worthwhile.
- the need for **effective** pre-entry, on-going and pre-exit **guidance** so that participants are aware of the range of opportunities available to them.

These issues are inferred from the descriptions of some major national and local initiatives. They arose again in the in-depth interviews in one region. Let us now turn to the views of managers and teachers on progression.

3 Progression policy in one region

The diversity of opportunities for progression described in Chapter 2 was mirrored in our more detailed study of opportunities in one region. The region contained many different kinds of providers of education and training opportunities. There were for example:

- three universities, each admitting adult students to degree level study and each having substantial continuing education programmes
- a central institution with special expertise in education and training for health care professions
- four further education colleges and one agricultural college
- 51 secondary schools, operating an 'open door' policy for adults. Six of these schools were designated community schools which provided additional day-time and evening classes for adults
- a community education service operating through five area offices to give support, advice and assistance to adults, including specialist adult basic education
- a thriving voluntary sector
- a range of community development initiatives with an education component
- an active Local Enterprise Company promoting education and training initiatives and developing adult guidance provision.

Clearly, all of these providers could not be studied in depth and the research focused on a small number of key institutions and services in order to obtain a flavour of their policy and practice in terms of progression. As mentioned in Chapter 1, we were interested in:

- whether a policy on progression existed
- if so, what was the rationale for it
- the key features of policy
- the factors affecting policy.

In depth interviews with 27 individuals were carried out to explore these issues. The sample included those responsible for developing and managing policy and those whose primary concern was teaching adults. Details of the sample are contained in Chapter 1. This chapter concentrates on policy aims and intentions.

Policies on progression

> We are in education to serve the learners; we are not serving them if we supply only dead-end courses.
>
> (FE Assistant Principal)

This quotation sums up the view of most providers. Education was a means to an end. Sometimes the end was employment; others emphasised learners' personal growth and development and highlighted increased self-confidence or widening

horizons. Participation, therefore, was to be encouraged and sustained, not regarded as a one-off event. This was as true for those on training programmes which it was hoped would lead directly to employment as for those participating in more general education courses. As one provider stated:

> Our sponsor would like to see us operating on a toothpaste model where we are just squeezing vigorously and scooting people out the other end... Education is about more than that.
>
> (Project organiser)

Example 1: Progression through a community-based initiative

One of our priorities is to target long-term unemployed male, adults from ethnic minorities and women returners. Our aim is to help local people access jobs, training and creative opportunities. Once people are on board, we have guidance input and a series of self-development programmes. Our staff link with the local FE college and with other community projects in the area.

Example 2: Adult Basic Education

We now have a development plan. This includes termly reporting from tutors and a yearly review by the management team. We assess attendance, numbers of completing students and so on. An important part is students' goals achieved and new goals for the next term. ...Tutors negotiate a contract with each learner and review it regularly. They re-negotiate if necessary. ...This helps build students' confidence by showing what has been achieved. We think it helps sustain participation.

These examples were unusual in having a clearly described policy on paper. It was more common for providers to point to the range of their provision, the existence of multiple entry and exit points and their links with other providers as evidence of their interest in progression. The policy in action was more important than a policy on paper. While few would dispute that actions speak louder than words, written policies can help in the institutional battle for resources and can be useful in determining priorities especially when the planning context changes. We shall return to this issue in the final chapter. For the moment, however let us concentrate on the key features of progression opportunities — providers' policies in action.

Key features of progression opportunities

It is noteworthy that three common features of progression opportunities emerged from our interviewees. These were:

- collaboration within and across sectors
- open access opportunities
- developing students' responsibility for their own progression.

It was these features which were highlighted by providers as evidence of progression being an important policy priority.

Collaboration within and across sectors

It was evident from interviewees that collaboration took many different forms and involved different partners. There was for example collaboration:

- among departments in the same institution to facilitate student progression
- among institutions in the same sector
- across sectors — such as between further and higher education or between the community education service and further education
- between education and industry.

The picture is of a complicated network of links both formal and informal, facilitating student entry, sustaining participation and encouraging students to progress to higher levels. Two examples illustrate something of the diversity of collaborative arrangements in operation.

Example 1: 'Chumming' to ease transition from participation in a community project to FE

'Chumming' involved the allocation of a tutor from the community education project to each student progressing to FE to bridge the transition. The tutor accompanied the student to the FE college and was a point of contact for college staff if problems arose with the students.

Example 2: School participation in an interagency group to widen access

A community school working with other providers and community development workers and the police to improve advertising of courses collaborated in referring students to appropriate provision and exchanged information about course developments.

Many collaborative links have been formed on an informal or semi-formal basis and the personal contact between members of different institutions was seen as equally important as more formal meetings between different bodies. This was true right across the spectrum of provision. One FE college access co-ordinator spoke of the importance of being able to speak directly to a contact in a receiving institution when developing individual learning programmes. Similarly, a community school tutor emphasised the need to be able to obtain direct and swift answers from a college contact when dealing with adult enquiries.

Open access opportunities

Open access was seen as encouraging initial participation and as encouraging regular participation in education and training. As far as initial participation was concerned, outreach courses developed by FE colleges provided through community centres were seen as attracting traditional non-participants and encouraging progression to courses within the colleges.

The vast range of courses available in different institutions and by different modes of study also helped participation. For example, higher education institutions in the region offered short courses for employees who were unable to spend long periods away from work. These institutions thought that regular, short courses, encouraged employees to be 'education minded'. The challenge was to provide a series of such short courses which built on students' previous knowledge and skills to encourage and sustain participation. This required detailed planning with local employers. Providers also offered many different levels of learning. Community schools are a prime example; their provision of many leisure activities is seen as one way of encouraging adults to take part in more formal learning. One school now organises a special holiday event encouraging adults to attend with their children. In addition to a variety of leisure activities during the week, short taster courses are provided in basic literacy and numeracy for the adults. The school regards this as a successful event with some 15% of the adults moving on to courses within the school.

Disadvantaged groups are a special focus of open access provision in the region. Although this is a prime concern for community-based initiatives, there are many other examples of this happening, including a range of provision made by FE colleges and SWAP's endeavours to encourage ethnic minorities through leaflets produced in community languages.

Developing students' responsibility for their own progression

The importance of progression issues was evident through the supply side of provision, collaborative arrangements and open access policies. However, the demand side was important too. Interviewees pointed to student-centred strategies which aimed at encouraging students to take initiatives — to see participation in terms of progression. There were examples of this approach in almost all sectors. Box 3.1 gives examples.

Box 3.1: Examples of student-centred strategies for progression

> *Regional Authority* — students encouraged to include a learning plan in their application for bursaries.
>
> *Adult Basic Education* — students negotiate a learning plan with their tutor at the beginning of their study.
>
> *Community Education Service/Voluntary Sector* — student self-development learning programmes developed and feature as part of provision.
>
> *Higher Education* — SCOTCATS students develop their own programmes in consultation with advisers of studies in HE institutions.
>
> *Further Education* — students encouraged to plan coherent programmes through induction programmes and options and choices modules.

These three areas, collaboration, open access and student-centred progression strategies were seen as underpinning a concern for progression opportunities. They seemed to us to have arisen in an *ad hoc* way rather than as the consequence of explicit

policy. Indeed, some practitioners were sceptical about the value of an explicit progression policy, fearing that it might become a straitjacket and narrow the range of opportunities for students. They stressed the need for flexibility and negotiation with students if opportunities were to remain dynamic and responsive to real needs. For example, tutors from the community school set up a stall in the local shopping centre to attempt to meet people and to advertise courses available. From this arose the realisation that there was a need for informal guidance which the school was unable to provide fully. Firstly, informal help was sought and later this developed into a network including local industry, secondary education, community education, the careers service and the local college business development unit. Now a steering group is to be formed which will also include an input from the voluntary sector. This is an interesting example of flexibility but it does not, in our opinion, provide a convincing argument against the need for a policy. An explicit policy highlighting progression issues would have flexibility as a characteristic where this was appropriate. Again, we return to this question of a need for a policy in the concluding chapter.

Staff development

Practitioners and policy makers alike referred to the need for planned programmes of staff development. This was important if students were to be provided with sound advice and guidance about progression opportunities. Staff development needs ranged across many areas but the most frequently mentioned was the need to encourage exchange of ideas and experiences among those working directly with students. It was reported that too many staff worked in isolation and ignorance of developments in their own sector and in other sectors. Opportunities to hear about real experience 'straight from the horse's mouth' would be valued.

A major concern was the professional development needs of part-time staff. Part-time staff dominate in many areas of adult education and there are special problems in funding staff development sessions for them. This is not a new concern. Munn *et al* (1989) reported on the training needs of part-time staff in community education and highlighted problems of financing provision. As education opportunities continue to grow, the professional development needs of this important group of staff remain an issue to be tackled.

This is not to deny the existence of staff development opportunities. There were many instances of tutors being brought together within the same institution to discuss student development. Similarly, college guidance teams provided written materials for first-time course tutors featuring progression issues, among others. Curriculum development and planning meetings under the auspices of SWAP consortia are further examples of staff development 'on the job'. However, most of the examples reported to us concerned full-time rather than part-time staff.

Progression for what?

Attracting and sustaining adult participation in education and training was a clear goal for all our interviewees. Translating this goal into practice involved much dedicated work by staff especially supporting students on courses and responding to the enquiries of potential participants. For instance, one-and-a-half hour interviews are carried out with each new adult basic education student in the region, whilst

pre-course interviews with adults responding to the Scottish Wider Access Programme advertisement for access to teaching, involved pre-course guidance for over 100 enquiries in one institution. A key element in such work is a clarification of students' goals and hoped-for gains from participation and progression. Three key points emerged from the data on this issue.

The first was that participation and progression in education and training opportunities did not guarantee employment. It was therefore important, at the macro level, to design provision which went beyond the strictly vocational. This point was made forcibly by those involved in urban projects. As one regional educational officer commented:

> There was a target for an urban project to try and reduce the numbers of unemployed by half with education and training. The recession has blown that!

At the micro level, that of guidance to individual students, it meant sensitive discussion of students' goals and anticipated gains from participation. The personal and social advantages of participation needed discussion as well as the potential advantages in the labour market. Tutors also pointed out that adults' understandable emphasis on employment goals presented them with dilemmas. For example, in the belief that any job was better than no job, some adults accepted short-term work in the midst of a training course. This made any notion of long-term planning inappropriate and could lead to a cycle of a series of dead-end jobs interspersed with bursts of training.

This led to the second point which is the lack of motivation of participants who are taking part in courses as a condition of receiving social security benefit or more generally to please someone else. Such adults generally do not do well and were recognised as a problem which progression strategies had not yet tackled successfully.

A third point was the detrimental effect that successful participation and progression strategies could have on local communities. The organiser of a project in a deprived area pointed out that many adults saw their goal of participation in education and training as being able to move out of the area. This could create greater social and economic problems for the area which could eventually be populated by a despondent 'underclass'. The paradox of a successful education strategy resulting in additional disadvantage for non-participants is well-known. In many ways it reinforces the point already made, that education can only be part of a multi-pronged strategy for economic and social regeneration.

Summary

This chapter has looked at progression opportunities in one region. It has highlighted the diversity of opportunities available and made the following points:

- There were few examples of explicit, written policies on progression.
- Three common features of *de facto* policies on progression were
  - collaboration among providers of education and training and between education and industry

  - open access provision
  - encouraging adults to develop their own learning programmes.
- The rationale for progression strategies was in terms of the needs of adult learners.
- Staff development was seen as important so that students were encouraged to develop coherent and sustainable progression. The lack of provision for part-time staff was a cause for concern.
- Education provision cannot be isolated from the social and economic context in which it takes place
  - courses had to have educational as well as vocational purposes
  - students need sensitive guidance about the relationship between participation and employment
  - successful progression strategies can sometimes have detrimental effects on local communities.

4 Providing information about progression opportunities

Students need good quality information and advice in order to take full advantage of the progression opportunities open to them. They need other things too, of course, such as financial support, access to opportunities within their locality and support from family and friends. However, unless students know about the opportunities available to them participation and progression are unlikely and/or unsatisfactory. This chapter concentrates on the ways in which students were helped to 'negotiate the labyrinth' of opportunities and reports providers' views on the effectiveness of these ways. All interviewees stressed the need for high quality information and advice. They emphasised the benefits of human contact — a warm body — as well as of clearly presented written information. The more the 'warm bodies' had direct experience of provision through working in various sectors the better. A project training co-ordinator sums up this point:

> Progression structures are a lot like the Hampton Court maze. On the outside it is daunting but once you are inside you usually find where the blind alleys are, and it's easy to operate. You have to be in the maze and be able to display the pathways to potential users.

Two main kinds of information were seen as useful:

- pre-course information aimed at those entering education and training for the first time as adult students
- on-course information, building information about progression routes into the normal structure of programmes so that students were routinely encouraged to consider sustaining their participation.

Although interviewees came from a range of institutions there was remarkable similarity in the ways they tried to provide information to prospective and actual students. There were also similarities in the problems encountered.

Pre-course information

Providers described the many different ways in which they made information about progression opportunities available. These included:

- general advertising — press and TV
- providing training access points (TAP) — a computer-based information system
- leaflets
- prospectuses
- local press reports of individual success stories
- personal contact

- word of mouth — 'our students are our best advertisement'
- providing drop-in centres where people could ask about courses
- open evenings
- community-based networks.

There was a consensus between policy makers and practitioners, that personal contact was the most effective — and also the most expensive way of providing information. As one regional education officer put it:

> Locating an information point in Safeways won't work unless there is some means of intelligent referral through an individual.

A major concern for practitioners was that people's perception of adult education was out-dated. Adults were ill-informed both about the range of opportunities on offer and about the institutions providing these opportunities. One adviser of studies in a university commented:

> It's about time that the more conventional institutions got across the fact of their own unconventionality.

Thus practitioners were even more strongly committed than policy makers to personal contact with prospective clients as the most effective way of promoting interest. In this respect 'getting out and talking to people' was seen as invaluable, especially if tutors were able to mount information points in public places such as local community centres. Similarly, favourable reports from students already attending courses were seen to be very influential, particularly for the more innovative programmes. However, some voiced the concern that word of mouth could be limiting, as certain sections of the population might never get to hear about courses. Therefore, other forms of information were required to counteract this problem.

Targeting certain groups within the community was generally regarded as a useful method for stimulating entry into the system. This did not mean advertising certain courses as suitable only for women or the unemployed. Rather it meant getting attention for a wide range of opportunities by targeting particular sections of the population such as mothers with young children, the long-term unemployed and so on. Examples of innovative approaches of reaching particular groups were given. One community-based project is considering advertising its existence on beer mats as a way of reaching a wide audience. Another was organising a raffle as a way of raising its profile. Yet some groups are notoriously difficult to reach. Providers recognise the difficulties of encouraging long-term unemployed males to return to education and training. No amount of advertising can make participation feel familiar and natural in communities where the macho activities are sports and socialising in pubs and clubs. Patient work is needed to break down barriers and develop provision which really meets community needs. Even so education is not a panacea for all social and economic ills.

Two further points need to be made before leaving the topic of pre-course information. First, there was universal praise for the region's careers service

resource guide. The guide was seen as invaluable in providing names and addresses for contacts and was an important aid to informal networking. Second, there was a general demand for better access to information. Ready access was important as it was maintained that adults often seek quick answers to enquiries once an idea strikes them. The experience of one community school tutor who was unable to 'get into the accreditation of prior learning system', even after repeated phone calls, is salutary. Two students, on whose behalf she was enquiring, drifted away before anything could be resolved.

In this context, there was also concern at the over-centralisation of information centres. Practitioners suggested that adults living on the outskirts of the city or beyond were not very likely to travel to one major information point within the city. The need for drop-in centres in outlying colleges was emphasised.

On-course information

So far we have been concentrating on information for those entering the education system for the first time. Our interviewees were also concerned to build in information about sideways and upwards moves as a routine part of programmes. For example, in operating a leisure activity programme for parents and children during the holidays, a community school built in information about basic numeracy and literacy courses and encouraged parents to consider doing these courses. Similarly, a voluntary organisation encouraged students to follow an eight week module on further opportunities. The module included topics for discussion such as 'Looking Forward', 'How to Move On' and 'My Map for the Future'.

Not all providers were able to build in such information, of course, but the development of a modular structure to many programmes meant that the possibility of doing so existed. It could also be an economical and effective way of providing guidance to many students. For such an approach to work effectively, however, staff development was essential. Managers worried about the extra demands being placed on tutors in this sphere especially as information is dynamic and it can be difficult for staff to keep up-to-date. They also accept that not all staff will approach the task of advising students on progression opportunities with equal enthusiasm. It may be, that some tutors, especially those working part-time in the voluntary sector or community education service, view progression with suspicion. As one member of the voluntary sector said:

> They may think that they will be doing themselves out of a job. ...They want to hang on to their class in case they get no takers for the new session.

Tutors working in teams helped to reduce feelings of isolation and insecurity and this also helped more positive views of progression to take root. The positive effects of team work were highlighted by practitioners themselves. It helped to have first hand experience of collaboration across sectors, as with SWAP. This kept people up-to-date about developments and was a form of on-the-job training about progression opportunities.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, staff development on progression issues was seen as important by both managers and practitioners. Such development was especially

important for tutors in direct contact with students. Information about progression opportunities could be discussed as a regular part of the programme and be natural. Staff commented that adult students could often be reluctant to be seen to be seeking specialist advice from guidance or careers personnel. Such specialist staff training the teaching staff and developing close links with them would be ideal but was not always practical because of resource constraints. An FE assistant principal commented:

> Progression and guidance! We could multiply staffing by four or five to do a good job.

Catering for individual needs

Our discussion thus far has implied that all adults have broadly similar information needs, distinguished only by their status as potential or actual participants. Of course, this is far from the case. The companion studies to this report (Blair *et al*, 1993; Lowden and Powney, 1993) have shown just how individual and particularistic adults' guidance needs can be. These studies, reporting the views and experiences of individual adults paint a complex picture of the kinds of ways in which adults made decisions about initial and continuing participation. Information or the lack of it is only one element in a complicated process.

Providers necessarily have to take a broad brush approach to supplying information. Resource constraints mean that information tailored specifically to the needs of each individual adult is out of the question. Yet providers are indeed conscious that their students will need different kinds of information at different times. Their aim is to be flexible and to develop a system that caters for individuals. This is the rationale for the emphasis on tutors as first-line guidance providers with the attendant staff development needs. However, in planning information provision, institutions and other providers need to try and categorise adult students so that at a strategic level they can make choices about priorities. Three broad categories of adult learner were identified by interviewees. These were:

- adults who possessed a reasonably clear understanding of the route they wished to take towards a specific goal
- adults who were unclear of either route or goal but were highly motivated towards self-improvement
- adults who might be described as 'reluctant' learners, such as adults experiencing economic and social deprivation, or ethnic minorities who lack the confidence to access learning.

It must be recognised that there is an extremely complex tension for providers and practitioners arising from the desire to make provision for these different categories. For example, how is it possible, with limited resources, to balance the needs of those in the first and second categories who actively seek education and training opportunities, with concern for the 'reluctant' learner? A central one door entry point for guidance and information in the region may be regarded as a significant development for the first category of adult, but it may be regarded as possibly too aloof or even geographically too remote for those in the third category who are struggling to identify their needs. Many expressed worry and frustration over such issues. What were seen as priorities in information provision for each of these groups?

Adults who know where they are going and how to get there

This first category presented fewest problems in terms of information provision. Nevertheless, such adults with a clear goal and a route mapped out, have information needs. The most important were seen as the financial, intellectual and social demands of participation in education or training. This was especially true when a protracted course of study was being contemplated. Adults contemplating a university degree, for instance, needed to be aware of student grants and loans, the costs of travel, books and materials and their housing benefit entitlement. In addition they needed information about workload, the demands on time and the implications of these for family life.

Initial guidance was seen as highly important for this group especially as regulations governing student grants and bursaries make it difficult for those students who embark on the wrong course. Grants are typically available for a set number of years and radical change of course which would take a student above these may make it difficult to fund a change of course.

Adults who are uncertain about their goals or how to achieve them

This is the group who, in the opinion of interviewees, are in the majority. Providers and practitioners alike stressed the importance of progression in terms of personal development for this group. A regional education officer summed up this view:

> Progression implies that the ladder goes up. For me, it is as much about personal and social development as about certification.

As with the first category, interviewees stressed the importance of sound information at the point of entry into the system, but they also emphasise the need for adequate support during the student's participation. There is often frustration that there is a lack of time to provide such support although it is considered particularly important for those who live in deprived areas.

Pace was also considered important for these students. Practitioners suggested that it was counter-productive to try to force the pace when many students develop gradually. Further, some maintained that, as adults in this group do not have a strong sense of direction when embarking on a programme of learning, allowance should be made for sideways movement between courses and even in and out of institutions at different stages of personal development:

> It's more respectable to acknowledge that leaving a course can be a very positive step for some. They have found something else out about themselves, or about the business of studying, which made another route more appropriate. We emphasise steady progression, but adults have a very different outlook on time. Students can go and come back with an open mind.
>
> (Continuing education tutor)

Connected with this was the view that progression should not be too closely linked with eventual employment. Obviously, some organisations, especially employment projects, will be thinking in these terms but, as one SWAP tutor pointed

out, it was important to encourage students to think broadly. Whilst some adults were well suited to a specific job-related course such as the BEd access course, others might benefit from obtaining Highers qualifications which would give them a greater scope of choice later in their development.

Students who were clarifying goals and uncertain about what was right for them needed to be able to sample different kinds of courses. Therefore the provision of taster courses, bridging courses and pre-access courses was seen as an important aspect of progression policy. Provision which was deliberately designed to smooth transition sideways or upwards was welcomed by practitioners as an important element in progression opportunities.

Two criticisms were made of current policy, one minor, one major. The minor gripe was directed at the use of portfolios to demonstrate previous learning and experience. Practitioners could see benefits in this approach in helping students gain access to programmes but it was seen as very expensive in staff time. It could take students up to a year to produce a portfolio to an acceptable standard and unless sensitively handled it could be a de-motivating process. The gripe is minor to the extent that other access avenues are open to students and as tutors become more experienced in accreditation of prior learning procedures they may well use them less frequently.

The more major criticism of progression policy was the lack of resources to develop high quality guidance. Students not only needed information and advice. Some also needed direct support via a 'buddy' system, or similar, particularly at times of transition. There was a feeling of letting some students down, by being unable to provide the continuity of support required:

> I sometimes feel quite bad. We open the door and encourage people to start, then we turn around and say to them, 'Come on, on you go now!'.
>
> (Voluntary organisation tutor organiser)

More generally, tutor support and guidance was the area identified as in particular need of development. Tutor-student relationships were seen as being at the heart of progression. A bad experience of adult education might put adults off returning, for life. As might be expected, this was the view principally of those involved in the community education service, the following quotation is typical:

> I think it goes right across the board with everything we do with adults. It's the tutor not the subject that really matters as to how much people get out of a course, what they really enjoy. I would like to see a lot of development in the area of tutor support and guidance.
>
> (Community school tutor)

Tutors were seen as having a key role to play in being prepared to encourage individual paths of learning and in being flexible in allowing the student the opportunity to experiment with new ideas.

Reluctant participants

The key point to emphasise here is that the provision of information about education and training opportunities for this group has to be proactive. As one provider put it:

> We're talking about poor people who have had hard lives, little experience of education, little or no experience of a career. They have a lot of personal pressure, lousy housing, all sorts of stuff, and these are real contextual difficulties in which to launch the brave ship of learning and knowledge.
>
> (Project officer)

If providers wish to overcome the social, economic and dispositional barriers to participation which were outlined in Chapter 2 then initiatives should be identified and designed in collaboration with the community. This is, however, a resource-intensive task which requires time and commitment if it is to be successful.

Summary

This chapter has considered the ways in which information about progression opportunities was made available and the information needs of particular categories of adults have been discussed. The main points are:

- Pre-course information is believed to be most effective if it involves direct personal contact between tutors and adults.
- Providers are trying to build information on progression opportunities into programmes. Modular curriculum structures make this relatively easy.
- People can have an out-dated image of adult education and the institutions offering education and training. There is a need to highlight innovations and the diverse opportunities now available.
- Tutors were regarded as key sources of information and had an important front-line guidance role. Staff development was a priority to up-date tutors' knowledge of progression opportunities or to raise awareness about supporting adults on progression routes.
- Three broad categories of adult learner were identified by interviewees:
  - — those who have a clear understanding of goals
  - — those who are highly motivated, but unclear about their goals
  - — those who are 'reluctant' learners.

  Each category needs rather different kinds of information and support.
- Little can be achieved without the support of a well-informed, trained and sympathetic staff.

5 How well is progression policy working?

This chapter is in two main parts. The first part considers the absence of any systematic monitoring and evaluation of progression policy by the providers sampled. The second part concerns perceptions of future developments in provision of progression opportunities, particularly in the context of the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act.

Monitoring and evaluation

The vast majority of those interviewed said that they saw a need for regular monitoring and evaluation of progression opportunities. Interestingly enough, the rationale for such activities was expressed in terms of accountability to the learner and of improving provision rather than in terms of more generalised public accountability for the stewardship of public money or to increase funds by demonstrating that quality assurance procedures were in place. As one FE college manager put it:

> We want to know that we are not sitting here dreaming up courses that are not useful. We want to know if the courses are to client and employer satisfaction.

This was echoed by a WEA tutor organiser:

> We need to find out more about what people want and if they are using the course in the way they want.

Thus evaluation was concerned with whether needs had been appropriately identified and, related to this, whether target populations were making use of progression opportunities. Where upward progression was concerned, such as moving from an access course to degree level work or from informal community based provision to a college, respondents were anxious to know how well their courses had prepared adults for the new demands and challenges they would face. They wanted to know how well, for example, ex-access students were doing in higher education and to be able to place local information in a broader national context. Yet providers readily admitted to the very limited efforts they were making to monitor and evaluate provision. Why did so little evaluation take place? Interviewees offered a variety of reasons.

- There was no explicit progression policy and so no clear statement of aims and objectives from which evaluation criteria might be drawn (see Chapter 3).

- It was difficult to establish valid and reliable criteria. Criteria such as first destination statistics, by themselves, it was suggested, are a poor indicator of quality. Success in gaining employment, for instance, often told one more about local labour markets than about the quality of courses.
- It was difficult to track students once they had left. It was relatively easy to collect information on students' intended destinations before a course ended. It was more difficult to know whether intentions had been fulfilled.
- Staff lacked time, other resources and the skills to carry out systematic monitoring and evaluation. Providers were often forced to rely on tutors for informal feedback on how the course had gone. Training in evaluation was needed if staff were not to perceive requests for feedback as threatening and so 'massage' a response. Economical, useful, and 'quality' criteria were needed.

A good deal of work has already been accomplished in the development of performance indicators in education. Many of these, such as the Warwick indicators (1987) focus upon institutional effort or processes as a reflection of quality. Similarly, *Measuring Up* (SOED, 1990) contains process as well as product indicators. It is noteworthy that our providers' concerns with meeting learners' needs are now in tune with moves in business and commerce to collect 'soft' indicators of quality. It is now accepted that valid measures of quality may be subjective as well as objective and that customer satisfaction and perception are important factors in assessing quality. Webb (1991), for instance, has argued that meeting customers' needs should form a major part of producers' strategy. Thus, in education, adult participants' reported satisfaction with their own educational achievement become important elements in determining success. However, we know from work in progress (Blair *et al*, 1993) that adults' educational achievements often increase their dissatisfaction with their lives and make them more critical of the kinds of educational provision they experience. Thus client satisfaction data on their own are not necessarily valid and reliable indicators of success.

It seemed to us that our respondents were voicing authentic concerns over the development of evaluation criteria which would be helpful to them in developing provision. The development of criteria needs to take place at different levels. At national level, it seems that basic statistics about adult students and progression are not available although this may be changing. The Scottish Wider Access Programme is beginning to generate fairly comprehensive and regular statistical information about participation and progress under its aegis. The Scottish Office is now publishing information about adult participation rates in schools, in vocational further education and in higher education. This is welcome. Yet we know little of the career histories of these adult students and the use they have made of different kinds of progression opportunities. There seem to be no national statistics about adult participation in community education provision and in the voluntary sector. This must increase their vulnerability in the competition for resources.

At institutional level participation and outcome criteria are likely to be of most use in collecting information about the success of progression opportunities in terms of initial participation, sideways moves and upward progression. Staff and student knowledge of progression opportunities or their knowledge of sources of information about such opportunities and staff awareness of progression as an option for students are also important. Many of these criteria are already in existence.

At course or programme level process criteria are perhaps most important. It is at this level that data can be most useful in developing and changing provision and teaching methods. It is probably at this level that staff development is most needed.

Examples of monitoring and evaluation

Respondents' ready acknowledgement that much remained to be done in the area of evaluation and monitoring should not be interpreted as a total absence of attempts to do something. At regional level some client satisfaction surveys were being carried out. These included:

- a feasibility study in collaboration with the regional enterprise company on the effectiveness of the adult careers service
- an evaluation of the effectiveness of regional adult guidance
- a study by the community education service on the influences on adults' choice of modules.

At institutional and project level, end-of-course evaluation is attempted but generally is seen as being of limited use. Where projects require formal returns, such as SWAP and CATS, this is seen as being useful as long as the returns are not too time-consuming to complete.

An innovative approach to evaluation was mounted by the Adult Basic Education Service. This involved tutors and their students regularly assessing the attainment of students' goals and the setting of new targets. From these individual assessments, team assessments were developed with tutors meeting regularly to discuss effectiveness of provision. The team leader is now convinced of the effectiveness of this approach which started out as a pilot project involving only two tutors. A standard evaluation form has been developed which tutors are asked to fill in once a term. The forms require details such as the composition of each group, average attendance figures, numbers of completing students, their age, whether they live in a disadvantaged area and their previous educational background. There is also a section which requires a more detailed breakdown of each student's achievement within a group, including work covered and comments on goals achieved and goals for next term. The tutors are now in the habit of sharing their forms and discussing problems and successes. The forms are also used by a team management committee which meets at a residential venue once a year to decide on a development plan for the coming year. The scheme is ambitious but noteworthy in its attempt to include both formal monitoring and self-evaluation and to have clearly established procedures for using evaluation information in subsequent planning.

It is worth mentioning that in our national investigations we came across many examples of questionnaires which contained information on student characteristics and opinions about programmes or projects. These were often stuffed into filing cabinets or drawers and never thoroughly analysed, far less used. Team leaders would typically glance through the returns to get a broad impression of opinion and that was that. This says something about the usefulness of the questionnaire, the time and other pressures on staff and the absence of procedures requiring course evaluation information to be taken into account in course planning.

We also came across examples of collaboration among institutions in providing feedback on course provision. SWAP is the obvious example where, for instance,

a tutor on a BEd access course looks to the teacher training institution to provide feedback on the quality of access provision.

Future developments in progression opportunities

All respondents saw the Further and Higher Education Act as affecting progression opportunities although there were disagreements about the nature and extent of its impact. The key features of the Act for progression opportunities, arguably, are:

- the incorporation of FE colleges, removing them from education authority control and funding. Under the Act, funding will be directly from the Scottish Office
- the specification of the kinds of courses for which FE colleges will receive funding, namely those leading to academic or vocational qualifications; preparing people for entry to higher education; providing instruction to people with learning difficulties; and courses assisting in increasing the level of competence in English for speakers of other languages
- the establishment of a Scottish Higher Education Funding Council and the specification of criteria and procedures for determining the level of funding to higher education institutions.

The main worries about progression opportunities were as follows:

- a potential division between certificated and uncertificated courses, with the latter becoming very expensive since funding is only for vocational courses
- the Educational Authority's loss of ability to co-ordinate provision
- the favouring of full-time over part-time study in terms of student grants and bursaries
- the failure of the Act to specify guidance as an essential service
- the lack of recognition of the important contribution of the voluntary sector
- the potential concentration of non-advanced courses bearing qualifications in FE colleges thereby increasing the hurdle to be jumped by those adults used to a range of provision in a local centre.

Practitioners were convinced in the words of one that, 'the whole ethos surrounding the Act is replacing co-operation with competition'. If this indeed happened and collaboration among institutions became less important then progression opportunities would suffer. It was maintained that the Act would increase the compartmentalisation of opportunities, flexibility would disappear and FE colleges would be forced into thinking mainly in cost-benefit terms. One regional education officer summed up the impact on progression opportunities:

> In a free market world, one establishment is competing with another. Therefore, progression goes on the back burner.

One interviewee did point out that it was still in the college's interest to work with other institutions in order to maintain a flow of students. In this context collaboration with industry and commerce was seen as particularly important and practitioners could see benefits to greater collaboration with business. Managers were more

sceptical and in particular wondered about the wisdom of having representatives from industry on college boards of management when it was evident that they had little knowledge of, and sometimes little interest in, education. The issue of collaboration and competition is considered in more detail in the final chapter. For the moment, it is worth highlighting the almost unanimous fears for the availability of an impartial guidance system. Respondents considered it vital that guidance should be impartial given their concern to provide students with clear and appropriate information to make choices.

Concern in different sectors

Anxieties differed according to the viewpoint of the provider, but it was clear that all sectors saw some threats to the continuing facilitation of progression.

Education authority

Here there were doubts as to how it could continue to enhance progression. Respondents were unsure of how they were going to be able to continue to fund and support all the initiatives at the basic level of entrance. Progression in terms of entry to the system was under threat. There was also concern over the relinquishment of overall control which would make planned provision more difficult. Further, there was the worry that output related funding, eg in terms of jobs gained, would severely disadvantage colleges in areas of high unemployment.

FE colleges

These saw some advantages in their prospective new role. Interviewees maintained that lack of education authority control would lead to a better spirit of negotiation and open discussion. They also welcomed the introduction of a capital budget which might help with long-term major projects requiring a large scale resource expenditure.

Higher education

University interviewees could see benefits in linking with individual FE colleges. They pointed to the fact that a large education authority is not always easy to deal with and that college independence could encourage development of new courses. One interviewee suggested that closer collaboration might also encourage a higher profile for the university in the local community, thereby promoting adult participation in university courses.

However, higher education institutions were uneasy that emphasis on increasing student numbers might have an adverse effect on guidance provision, student support services and staff-student relationships.

Community schools

Unlike the colleges and universities, who did see both advantages and disadvantages under the Act, community schools were pessimistic about the near future. They saw the possibility of being forced to the periphery as colleges seek to increase student participation rates. Whilst they were reasonably confident that they would be able

to maintain informal contacts with the colleges, they were fearful of a reduction in formal partnerships. They were also uncertain whether they would be able to sustain a number of their more informal courses through a lack of resources. This might reduce the number of first-time returners and thus they maintained that an important link might be lost.

Projects, voluntary organisations and community education

Respondents here saw a big problem in their ability to maintain links with further education. This had been one of their main strengths in the past but these links had depended upon a formal structure. If this disappeared they could have far more difficulty operating as an initial entry point within the system. They were unsure whether information would continue to flow to them from the colleges. Regional authorities have a statutory right under the Further and Higher Education Act, 1992 to provide community education and links with FE are an important aspect of provision. Those working in the voluntary sector believed that non-formal education was still seen as operating in a 'grace and favour situation' with no clearly formed links with other sectors.

Considerable energy has been put into developing progression in all areas of adult education within the region and providers still look forward to dealing with issues in the hope of continuing the forward momentum. In connection with this they highlighted: clarifying issues of funding, both for courses and for students; providing more staff development so that people could adjust to the new learning culture; combating what many see as an undue emphasis on vocational progression; and bringing groups ever closer together to form permanent structures for ease of movement between courses and institution. On their own admission some of the initiatives may have been small but they do add up to a considerable thrust. It is to be hoped that some of the pessimism and frustration noted in this chapter will not intensify if movement towards more market-led provision gathers momentum. Much might be lost in the process.

Summary

This chapter has concentrated on two issues: monitoring and evaluation and major concerns for the future. In summary the main points are:

- Managers recognise that current efforts at monitoring and evaluation progression are limited. They are unsure of what counts as significant evidence of achievement and have limited resources of funding and staff time at their disposal.
- Limited formal monitoring and informal evaluation are carried out by practitioners. In one interesting case these two aspects are linked in a yearly development plan.
- Practitioners are particularly keen to find out more about what happens to students after they leave a course in order to measure how successful they have been in achieving course objectives. They therefore look to feedback from receiving institutions.

- It is recognised that the new Further and Higher Education Act is likely to have a far reaching impact on progression. Both managers and practitioners alike identify continuation of funding, co-ordination of strategies and increase of competition as major areas of concern in relation to the Act. Practitioners are also concerned that impartial guidance provision should be availble.

6 Policy implications

We began this report by stressing the wide variety of opportunities for progression which are now available in Scotland. Adults have a choice of providers ranging from the community education service and voluntary agencies to further and higher education institutions. They also have a choice of forms of provision; full-time, part-time, open and distance learning are available and flexibility in participation is one of the hallmarks of community-based provision.

We also highlighted the three main meanings of progression which have guided the research:

- entry into the system
- sideways moves within the system
- upward movement to higher level courses.

Opportunities for progression in all these senses are important in developing a flexible, adaptable and highly skilled workforce and for the social development of individuals and comunities. As earlier chapters have shown, government, employers and a wide range of providers of education have, in different ways, developed innovative schemes both to attract new participants to education and training and to encourage those who have returned to sustain their participation. Much has already been achieved, as statistics on adult participation show, but much remains to be done. This chapter aims to highlight the key issues arising from the research and to discuss the policy implications of them.

The key issues are:

- the importance of collaboration
- the need for more effective adult guidance
- the need for systematic evaluation and monitoring
- staff development and training.

The importance of collaboration

The description of national and regional progression opportunities has identified collaboration as a crucial element. Collaboration can take many forms and involve different partners. There are examples in this research of collaboration:

- among departments in the same institution
- among institutions in the same sector
- across sectors
- between education and industry
- involving central and regional government and educational institutions.

Collaboration takes time and effort but it is clear from the accounts presented in earlier chapters that it has benefited adult students and the institutions and professionals involved. Benefits have included:

- encouraging participation in education by traditionally under-represented groups as in the examples of Adult Learners' Week and the Strathclyde Collaborative Programme
- providing clear upward progression routes as in SWAP
- encouraging sideways moves as in SCOTCATs and in numerous FE college initiatives.

Through collaborative arrangements institutions have been encouraged to consider a broader range of entry qualifications for admission to courses and clearly articulated courses have been developed. SWAP is a good example of the benefits of collaboration. Numbers of students on SWAP courses have risen steadily, from about 750 in its first year of operation 1988/89 to almost 2,000 in 1992/93 (SOED, 1993). It has been successful in attracting students from working class homes (Gallagher *et al*, 1992) and students report high levels of satisfaction with their access courses (Munn *et al*, 1993). A high proportion of students successfully make the transition from access courses to higher education and staff involved in FE and HE are very positive about the experience of teaching SWAP students.

Market forces and collaboration

There is a risk that the kinds of collaboration which have encouraged adult participation and progression will be jeopardised by the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act with its emphasis on competition among institutions and on quantitative performance indicators as an instrument of public accountability and as evidence of successful provision. We are just beginning to build up research evidence on the operation of market forces in adult education. There is more substantial evidence about the effects on schools and some of this is disquieting (eg Adler *et al*, 1989; Lee, 1990; Miliband, 1991; Tomlinson, 1993). For example, studies of parental choice in England and Wales are showing that, in the case of popular schools, schools are beginning to choose pupils rather than vice versa. Furthermore, as funding follows the pupil, pupils who are likely to be expensive because, for example, they have learning difficulties, can find it difficult to get their first choice. Since performance indicators for schools stress examination performance and attendance rates, pupils likely to depress scores are not welcome.

Will there be similar consequences in adult education? Will we see FE colleges provide increasingly high status and high earning vocational courses and question the profitability of links with non-formal education? If education is seen as a commodity to be sold at a profit and colleges are seen as businesses selling the commodity, what happens to potential students unable to pay the going rate?

Will FE colleges be tempted to form cartels, restricting provision and raising prices? It may be that colleges will divide up the market and specialise in particular subject areas or levels of certification. It would be a pity if market forces encouraged a diminution in the range and variety of provision currently available. Research on adult participation in education shows that geographical location is often the most important reason for adults' choice of provider.

In higher education will universities, currently opening their doors to non-standard entrants quickly close them again, if they fear that these students will perform less well than school leavers and so depress universities' performance indicator profile? Performance indicators on examination performance which

identified the 'value added' by the universities to the students' attainments rather than concentrating on raw results might contain any tendency on the part of universities to admit only traditionally qualified entrants.

There are dangers for adult participation and progression if market forces reign supreme. However, if we know what they are, we can do something about them. It seems to us that there are four main policy implications in this context:

- **government needs continually to emphasize the importance of collaboration within and across sectors**
- **incentives for collaboration could be provided once criteria had been established to avoid artificial collaborative programmes**
- **a small number of staff could be appointed to encourage collaboration and disseminate good practice**
- **non-standard entrants to higher education could attract a special weighting to encourage universities to continue to admit these students.**

Adult guidance

It was clear from the research that the provision of information and advice to adults was a high priority for providers of education. Chapter 4 described the many different ways in which pre-course information was made available. It also described the strategy of building consideration of further opportunities in education and training into programmes of study. The need for guidance to have a 'human face' was stressed. Little can be achieved without the support of a well-informed and trained staff, sympathetic to the guidance needs of adult students. This raises the issue of staff development which is discussed later. Here, we wish to emphasise that the very diversity of adult learning opportunities on offer can bewilder and confuse. Furthermore, since there is no obvious reference point for information and advice, adults' awareness of opportunities can be haphazard or inaccurate. The recently announced national initiative on guidance is welcome and its findings are awaited with interest (SOED 1993).

Interviewees expressed worries about the effects of client-led funding on guidance. Their concern was that guidance would operate more in the interest of institutions than attempt to meet adults' needs. It is still too early for research evidence on this issue. However, in a companion study, involving in-depth interviews with 50 adult returners in different educational settings, Blair *et al* (1993) gathered some evidence about the unfortunate effects on guidance which client-led funding can have. The sample is small and not generalisable. However, it adds weight to the concerns expressed in this study. Two examples illustrate the point; both concern further education One man returned in order to qualify as a motor mechanic. After discussion with the college's engineering department, he found himself enrolled in an introductory course in engineering and construction, which was not what he needed to qualify as a motor mechanic. His impression was that the department was keen to get students to enrol in this particular course. Of the 13 students originally enrolled, 4 remained at the time the interview took place. The second example concerns a woman who wanted to do a leisure class in tapestry. She was persuaded to take a modular maths course and a Higher in APH instead. She said she was perfectly happy with these courses but when she'd finished she would still like to pursue tapestry. Is it significant that the college did not offer tapestry in its

provision? Of course, we do not have sufficient information about these two courses to be able to determine objectively the appropriateness of the advice. Perhaps it was the result of staff making these enquirers aware of the range of opportunities the college could offer and was shrewdly judged. These students' experiences, however, raise the question of the impartiality of the guidance offered by providers from all sectors—a cause for concern which will remain while all are under pressure to increase student numbers. The policy implications here would seem to be:

- **there is a need for guidance services to be co-ordinated at a regional level so that there is an easily identifiable reference point for adults**
- **guidance services need to be and be seen to be impartial**
- **outreach work, where providers go into local communities and work with them to identify education and training needs should be encouraged as a way of attracting under-represented groups to education and training**
- **advertising ought to target particular groups, such as women returners, rather than emphasise courses.**

Evaluation and monitoring

The issue of evaluation is one which concerns policy makers and practitioners alike. Almost all aspects of the education service are now evaluated although the purposes of evaluation can vary. Evaluation is usually seen as fulfilling two different but not necessarily incompatible purposes; to demonstrate institutional or departmental accountability for the provision on offer; and as a means to improving that provision. Evaluation for accountability purposes typically concentrates on easily measurable 'objective' criteria such as the numbers of students on courses, first destinations of students, qualifications gained and so on. These kinds of information can be useful in strategic planning. It is noteworthy that few providers in this study were able to supply statistics about progression. In this they mirror institutions in England and Wales where McGivney (1992) found little evidence of evaluation of the take-up of progression opportunities. She comments:

> Most adult educators take it for granted that many adults return to certificated learning via general non-certificated education. However, few providers have comprehensively recorded the starting points and destinations of adult learners.

She points out that collecting valid and reliable information would be a complicated and costly business and yet at a time when non-certificated courses have to prove their worth, evidence of the role they play in encouraging adult progression would be valuable.

It was noteworthy that in our study it was specially funded programmes which were most likely to collect information about students' previous educational participation and their progression routes.

Evaluation can also help tutors to reflect upon their practice and identify any mismatch between student needs and provision. This kind of evaluation explicitly for the purpose of improving provision, often concentrates on teaching and learning processes. Outcomes such as adults' enhanced self-confidence, increased enjoyment in learning and development as independent learners are frequently cited as

important evaluation criteria. However, they appear less often as explicit aims of courses, with some notable exceptions in adult basic education provision, and can be difficult to measure. Few providers had well thought out and feasible evaluation schemes. It may be that the recently published document on performance indicators for the community education service (HMI, 1993) and the development of quality assurance procedures in further and higher education will encourage informal approaches to monitoring and evaluation. However the issue of what counts as quality in adult education is fundamental. This leads us to suggest that:

- **research on conceptualising quality in adult education is commissioned**
- **a pilot scheme is set up whereby institutions (including the community education service) attempt economically to collect information on student progression**
- **a match between course aims and evaluation criteria is encouraged**
- **in all forms of evaluation those concerned should be clear about the evidence which will indicate whether aims have been met.**

Staff development

Running through many of the issues already mentioned is the question of staff development. It underpins effective guidance; is necessary for the systematic monitoring and evaluation of courses; and is important in the identification of education and training needs in deprived areas. Furthermore, as institutional cultures begin to change away from the primacy of departmental structures to one where students 'pick and mix' from different subject areas, training on identifying and meeting adult students' needs in the context of institutional provision is required. The importance of staff-student relationships is evident for successful adult participation and progression. Subject teachers as first-line guidance providers may become the norm. If so, quite fundamental changes in perceptions of the nature of teaching in further and higher education will be essential. This suggests that:

- **information about teaching adult students is built into staff development programmes**
- **the advantages and disadvantages of developing certificated courses in the teaching of adults be explored**
- **information about progression opportunities is a regular part of staff development**
- **particular attention is given to the staff development needs of part-time staff who now make up a substantial part of further, informal and community education provision.**

Conclusion

We began this report with a quotation from HMI about the abundance of educational opportunities for adults. There is an accompanying assumption that encouraging adult participation and progression in education is a 'good thing'. The government, employers and educational providers, themselves, often stress the importance of education and training for economic growth. Few would disagree. A highly educated, skilled and adaptable workforce is *one* ingredient to promoting such growth. However, when figures from the Employment Department tell us that

unemployment is around three million and that job vacancies number 105,000, then we should be aware that encouraging participation in education is only one of a number of strategies needed for promoting economic recovery. In our opinion, providers should beware of conveying to adult returners that possessing qualifications is an automatic passport to a job, especially when the Treasury's 1992 autumn statement assumes that unemployment in the UK will be 2.9 million in 1995-96, for the purposes of planning public expenditure. Employment is one potential gain from returning to education but education by itself is no panacea for deep structural economic and social problems.

Adults consistently report personal and social gains as most important from a return to study. SCRE research presents a similar picture, with adults mentioning gains such as increased confidence in oneself, and meeting new friends as important. Most educational institutions want to provide opportunities for people to develop their talents and extend their horizons. This is as important a reason as employment for encouraging participation and progression. Indeed, some studies, (eg McGregor *et al*, 1991) have demonstrated that switching resources out of preparing people for a very depressed labour market and into building a broader educational base, which includes, for example, personal and social development skills, is a much more effective strategy than narrowly based vocational training.

Finally, frequent mention has been made of the lack of progression policy. This was the case for many of the providers. Absence of policy did not prevent progression opportunities arising but these opportunities could be *ad hoc* and short-lived. Furthermore, the absence of policy could mean the neglect of progression as a priority with the associated neglect of staff development and training in this area. Progression can suffer in institutions having to cope with many innovations and demands where there are no clear targets, evaluation or monitoring. Policy itself is no substitute for action, of course. Paper policies are only as good as an active and committed staff, adequately resourced to put them into practice. Yet paper policies can be vital in highlighting institutional goals. Sustained national, regional and institutional policy initiatives are one way of keeping progression opportunities high on the agenda.

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Appendix A

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